

# Social Ecology of Immigrant Population and Changing Urban Landscape of Thimphu, Bhutan

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**Abstract** This study addresses social-ecological dynamics in the capital city of Thimphu of Bhutan with focus on the immigrant population. Like other developing countries, Bhutan is experiencing rapid urban expansion mainly due to immigration from rural to urban areas. Internal migration has led to major socio economic and demographic changes in the Bhutanese cities. This paper explicates the urbanization of the capital city and my empirical analysis is based on the sample survey of 251 immigrant households of Thimphu town surveyed in 2010. The analysis is carried to study the variables such as gender, age, occupation and educational characteristics. The living conditions of sample households and their attachment with the place of origin with frequency of visits along with the year of migration and reasons for migration are also captured to interpret the changing urban landscape and social ecology of Thimphu. The results thus acquired are likely to be used for the future planning of the capital city of Bhutan.

**Key words** social ecology, immigrant population, urban landscape, urbanization process, living conditions

## I. Introduction

Bhutan is globally known for its Buddhist cultural heritage well preserved till date and most renowned for its unique and pristine environment rich in biodiversity and nature conservation. Unlike other countries that have been transformed by increasing human interventions, the ecological processes, both natural and social in characteristic are nearly intact in Bhutan. Until the 1980s, the pace of development has been very slow due to a very late contact to the outside world. However despite the rigorous conservation policies and the development philosophy of Bhutan of 'Gross National Happiness' adopted as major planning agenda by Royal Government of Bhutan in 1972, rural out-migration and urbanization both are occurring at an accelerating stage in Bhutan. The present development trends and anthropogenic pressures mostly the increasing demands for modern goods and services and the impact of globalization have stimulated the process of rural out migration and concentration of immigrant population in urban centres of Bhutan. The urban landscape of Bhutan which was nearly absent in 1960s has been now modifying the traditional indigenous rural landscape of Bhutan at a much faster rate. Bhutan is a developing country and most of its people (69.1%) live in rural areas, while urban population consists 30.9% (Population and Housing Census of Bhutan, 2005). Day by day increasing unemployment in young youth population in rural areas as well as the drive for better opportunities and better jobs

in urban centres is increasing the rate of out-migration gradually. Migration is a socio-demographic process. Therefore, it is crucial to know the condition of socio-economic status of migrants. Through this any kind of development initiatives can be taken properly (Chowdhury et al., 2012). The rural poor consider migration as a process to be free from the vicious cycle of poverty (Islam, 2009). Poverty is a social curse which resists the development of a society. Yet, by migration strategy, poor people can get better opportunities to remove their poverty and enhance their socio-economic condition (Siddique, 2003). Thus, migration plays a greater role to poverty reduction. Their socio-economic mobility is considered as a necessary condition for sustainable development and poverty alleviation (Rakib and Islam, 2009). Due to such situation, an overwhelming number of people seek greater opportunities for their livelihood in urban areas.

This study is conducted on two different aspects related to the social ecology of immigrant population and the changing urban landscape of Thimphu. A limited number of studies are conducted concerning what happens to the socio-economic status of migrants after migrating into a new urban setting. The social ecology as considered here relates to a broader issue of social dynamics taking place in the city immigrant population. It is considered that socio-economic factors are important determinants of success of immigrant population. The traditional questions of social ecology centred on the socio-economic organization of space in accordance of the growth and

evolution of city landscape are not considered in the present investigation; rather it focuses on the socio-economic attainments of the immigrants and their contact with the source of origin.

The world city hypothesis as proposed by John Friedmann (1986) in late eighties also opened a new viewpoint to urbanization linking the city forming processes to the larger historical movement of industrial capitalism. The social ecology of cities was no longer interpreted subject to individual choices only; it came to be viewed instead as a product of specifically as societal forces set in motion by capitalist relation of production. Ever-increasing evidence suggests that the social ecology of immigrant population is greatly determined by the social, institutional and economic circumstances of that population, as well as its linkages to their sources of origin. This study concerns these issues and seeks to identify the socio-economic status of migrants after migration. It is found that, most of the migrant's social and economic status enhances after migration. The comparable findings were reported by Chowdhury et al. (2012) in their study of Sylhet City, Bangladesh where the authors concluded that, internal or rural to urban migration plays a dominant role in the improvement of the socioeconomic status of the migrants and the reduction of poverty in Bangladesh. Similar studies were conducted by Begum (2005), Garip (2008), Haider (2010), Klvanova (2010), Kcapar (2010), and Ma, H and Lian, L. (2011). The present investigation is undertaken therefore to address the research questions as to whether the migrants in Thimphu city are engaged in gainful employment to make a significant change in their socio-economic conditions? Are they satisfied after their migration in Thimphu? At present people from all different districts in Bhutan are migrating to nearby city centres and to a greater extent to the capital city of Bhutan. The rationale behind this research paper is to explore the socioeconomic condition and other matters related to the migrants who have migrated in Thimphu city in recent past.

## II. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to capture the demographic status such as gender and age distribution, occupational structure and educational attainment of migrant sample households. The investigation is also focussed to explore the reasons of migrant sample households and their linkages with place of birth, year of migration, attachment and visits to place of origin. The paper also addresses issues like the assessment of living conditions

and the level of satisfaction of sample migrant households in Thimphu, the capital city of Bhutan.

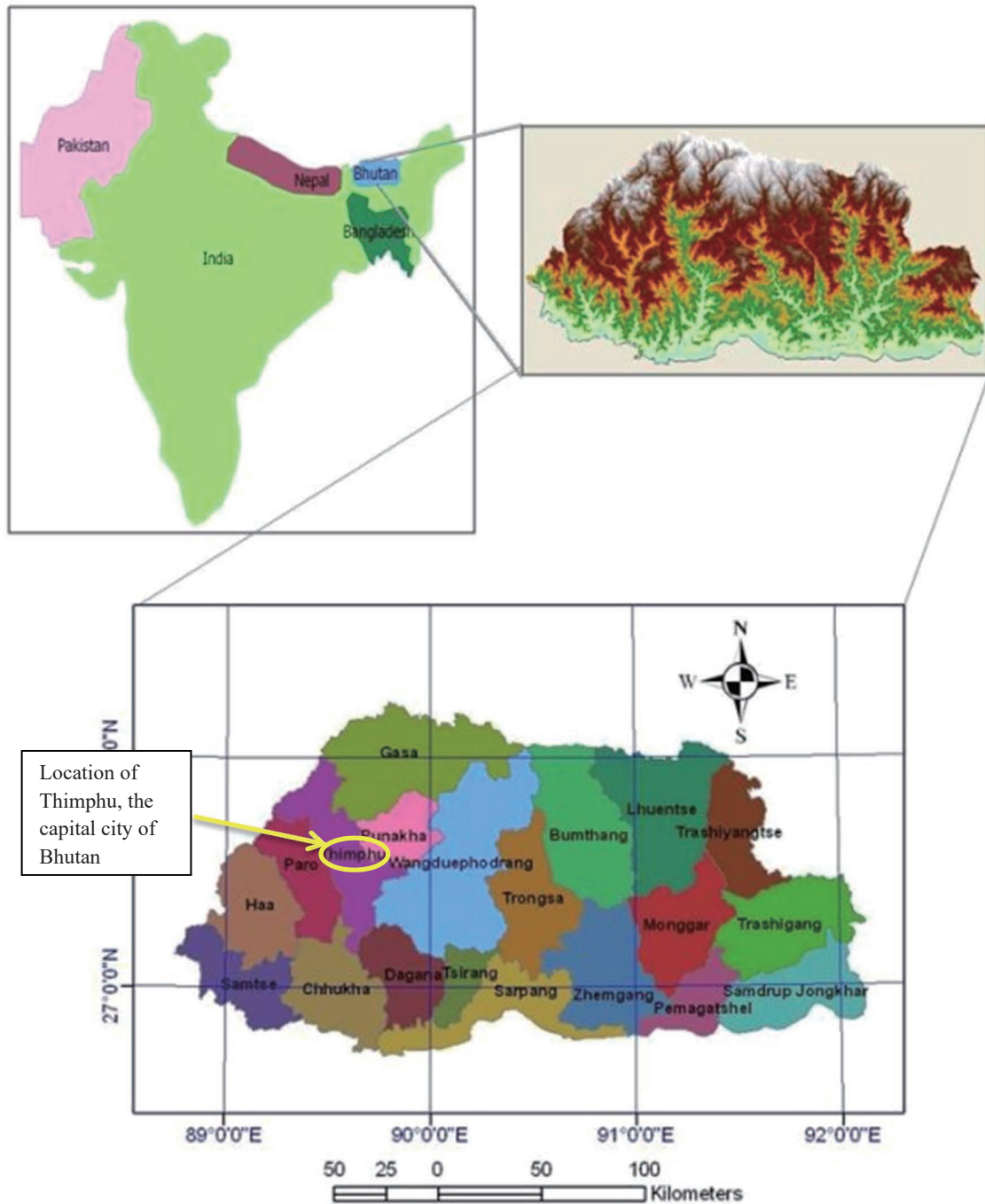
## III. The Evolution of Thimphu Town and Changing Urban Land Scape

Thimphu, a small capital town of the kingdom of Bhutan (Figure 1) is situated at an average elevation of 2,330 m. It lies in a narrow valley on the banks of river Wangchu stretching from Dechencholing in the north to Babesa in the south. Though it stretches about 13 km but it is not more than one km wide at most places. It has an area of approximately 26.13 sq.km and a total population of 79,185 as the first census of Bhutan conducted in 2005. The development of Thimphu as a town is very recent. In the past, Thimphu valley consisted of terraced fields where people mainly cultivated rice. The construction of Tashichho Dzong or "the fortress of the glorious religion" took about 9 years from 1961 to 1969 (Norbu, 2008, p. 55). According to Chakravarti (2003) the Old Dzong (fortress) was built in the 13th century by lama Phajo Drugom Shigpo, who came from Tibet. The Dzong was enlarged first in 1755 by Chhogyal Sherab Wangchuk, the thirteenth Deb (1744–1763AD). The New Dzong was completed in 1969 under the orders of third Druk Gyalpo Jigme Dorji Wangchuk (1952–1972 AD). At the time, the main shopping centre, comprising of around 25 shops, was located near Dechen Zam (Bridge). Most of the labourer lived in hutments in and around the Tashichho Dzong and Motithang area.

Only after the construction of the administrative centre Tashichho Dzong was completed in 1969, the focus was turned towards urban development. In 1960, Thimphu encompassed as many as 13 villages (Zilukha, Hejo, Junshina, Langjophaka, Motithang, Chang Geney, Chang Dajo, Chang Jangsa and Chang Gedaphu) of which only two remain now and these rural settlement structures are also slowly being replaced by new urban buildings. When the town began to expand in its present location along the Norzin Lam in 1970s, there were no master or town plans to guide the construction of roads and streets, residence and office buildings.

People began to construct houses wherever they found convenient and as directed by the stars and according to astrologers (Norbu, 2008, p. 57). A planned development program for Thimphu was initiated in 1985 that is Thimphu Urban Development Plan (1986–2000) when the National Urban Development Commission now Department of Urban Development and Engineering Services was established. In 2002, a comprehensive structure

## Location Map



**Figure 1.** Location of Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan shown in the District map of Bhutan  
Source: Population and Housing Census of Bhutan, 2005

plan, 2002–2027 was drawn for the future expansion of Thimphu, designating particular areas for specific functions. To understand the growth and the contribution that urban development has made it is imperative to know the sequence of events that took place in the past. For that purpose, Norbu (2008, p. 57) has divided the growth trend of Thimphu in to five phases-before or till 1959, between 1960 to 1970 between 1971 to 1980, between 1981 to 1990, between 1991 to 2004 and the most recent phase that may

be added to it is after 2004.

Thimphu till the 1950's was very thinly populated with scattered settlements, the activities of which revolved around the religious structures and the administrative centre that is Tashichho Dzong. At this phase settlements were developed around centres of power like the Dzongs (fortress) and religious urban structures. Dzongs (fortress), Goenpas (a place of meditation) and Lhakangs (Buddhists temple) were usually sited in strategic locations

with commanding view to the valleys below. Thimphu had and still has two Dzongs and numerous Lhakhangs such as Bap, Thadri Goenpa, Changangkha, Samarzingkha, Phajoding, Wangduetse, Dechenphodrang, Dechenphu, etc. These nuclear settlements and the lhakhangs were connected by footpaths and mule tracks dotted by mani dangrim (The sacred chorten or stupa was built by Phajo Drugom Zhigpo's in the 18th century.), prayer wheels and chortens running parallel to the Wang Chhu River, a tributary of the Brahmaputra River (Norbu 2008, p. 59).

It was only in the late 1960s and early 1970s that Thimphu began to take on the form that we see today. Modern institutions cropped up, new settlements began to take shape along the main spine, the Thimphu Phuentsholing highway. The organic and traditional settlements slowly gave way to modernization and under the farsighted leadership of late his Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuk (1929–1972). During the reconstruction of the New Dzong most of the surrounding hillsides became barren and the main commercial area was located near the Dechen Zam, which is now used as a driving training ground. This commercial area existed because it was in close proximity to the Dzong, which was undergoing major renovation at that time. While traditional building practices and living condition continued to develop at their own pace in the rural areas, the first attempts to structure urban space were undertaken in 1964 with the preparation of the master plan for the capital (Norbu 2008, p. 61).

The early seventies witnessed a surge in the construction of houses and offices in Thimphu with the growth of civil service and commercial activities. All of 1973 and the first half of 1974 were busy years sprucing up Thimphu for the coronation of his majesty the king Jigme Singye Wangchuk (Norbu, 2008, p. 63). Hotels were built to house the international dignitaries who came to attend the coronation, the young and energetic monarch then led Bhutan in its stride towards achieving gross national happiness, the development philosophy of Bhutan. With the increase in population settlements and institutions began to develop along the roads which kept on sprucing up uncontrolled and in ad hoc incremental manner. The old traditional villages and the intrinsic charm began to disappear. To consolidate this government stressed on continuing traditional architectural style which began to reappear in new buildings. The Norzin Lam became the main commercial space. At first, local traditional building style and knowhow were used though increasingly Indian standards and typologies were adopted. Large colonies of different types of dwelling reflecting the social status of their users

gradually made up the urban landscape. Along with the remarkable expansion of government buildings, the commercial centre developed along one of the city's main axis, Norzin lam, with uniform single storey shop housed in traditional houses (Norbu, 2008, p. 63).

The 1980s were marked by new policies and strategies to consolidate development areas and streamlining the so far relatively unplanned and haphazard urban development. As home ownership was being encouraged, housing colonies, which previously had a uniform appearance, were dismantled and sold to the private sectors, resulting in a more hybrid settlement tissue comprising a mixture of traditional and imported dwelling pattern and styles. Thimphu has been searching for its own urban tradition and identity to give impression of the scale and nature of Bhutan's urbanization; in 1986 the population of the capital Thimphu numbered 16,000 of a total country's population of approximately 600,000. Of the housing stock, 72% was occupied by government official and rented by the royal Government (Norbu 2008, p. 65). Major efforts have been made to give each urban building type a traditional appearance.

According to Norbu, the 1990s marked the consolidation of the previous phase and traditional architecture was stressed not only in Thimphu but in other smaller district towns also. More and more engineers and architects trained outside the country assumed offices and began to restructure the urban growth. There were hardly any qualified urban planners and the growth of the capital city. Private structures were built along the Thimphu-Phuentsholing highway and urban sprawl began to take shape in the outskirts of the municipal boundary. The population of Thimphu in 2000 was 43,479 as per the Thimphu City Corporation's survey conducted in the year 2000. Approximately 66% of the total population lived the areas of the core, Motithang, Changzamtog, Hejo and Langophaka. The remaining 34% lived in the areas that were recently included in the city limits (Norbu, 2008, p. 67).

The city comprises of a number of old villages such as Dechencholing, Samtelling, Jongshina, Hejo, Langjophaka, Zilukha, Changjiji, Luntenphu, Simtokha and Babesa. These areas were dotted with traditionally designed houses which are located close to one another resetting in relatively dense population. Sparsely populated residential areas often surrounded them. The city also had fairly large institutional dwelling areas housing a considerable population. These are the Royal Body Guards' settlement in Dechencholing, the Royal Bhutan Police cantonment in Changzamtok, the Royal



Bhutan Army in Lungtenphu and the Dantak Settlement in Babesa. The traditional urban villages had different characteristics. Many traditional structures have now given way to modern buildings especially in Jongshina, Langjophaka, Semtokha Changjiji and Babesa (Norbu, 2008, p. 67). However Zilukha and Dechencholing have still managed to maintain their traditional character. The core town area and Motithang settlements are modern in character as the buildings are of recent origin. These areas also have a considerable number of government quarters. Motithang is more of an affluent suburb while Changzamtok houses predominantly the lower income group. Now the gentle slopes and flat areas in the villages were already developed and inhabited. The steeper slopes had orchards, with residential development of low density. Occasionally the steeper slopes are dotted with huts, the largest cluster being in Chang Gedaphu popularly known as Kala Bazaar (Norbu, 2008, p. 67).

The urbanization process as described above has made a significant contribution in the development of Thimphu as a capital of Bhutan. The estimates of city population from 15,000 in 1980 to about 43,479 in 2000 (Norbu, 2008, p. 72) which increased to 79,185 as per the first census of Bhutan conducted in 2005 (PHCB, 2005). From the view point of social and economic development, more has happened in the past 40 years than that occurred in the previous 300 years (Planning Commission, 1999, p. 20). Since 1962, with the coming of first motorable road, Thimphu experienced unprecedented development. More than half of all vehicles in Bhutan cruise Thimphu's streets, which were widened, extended, and paved in preparation for the November 2008 coronation of King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck (Walcott, 2009). Thimphu city corporation is looking after the affairs of the town. The Thimphu Structure Plan 2002–2027 has identified traditional settlements and religious structures to be preserved, conserved and protected (Ministry of Works and Human Settlements, Royal Government of Bhutan, Thimphu, 2002). Efforts to expand and/or relocate villages into new towns, intervening opportunities for population absorption, can be seen in the rise of Khuruthang, connected by a bridge to its agricultural roots along the “Capital City Belt” between Thimphu and Punakha (Rinzin et al., 2005). There are problems and challenges, such as the shortage of affordable housing, huge influx of immigrants, high land prices and disturbances to ecologically fragile areas being faced by the town now. The city corporation is not able to even carry out the routine responsibility and the challenges of a very dynamic urban growth.

#### IV. Demographic Status of Immigrant Sample Households in Thimphu

Approximately all households living in Thimphu have an immigrant background. Taking an average household size of 4.6 persons per households as worked out by Population and Housing Census of Bhutan 2005 (PHCB, 2005, p. 421), the total number of households in Thimphu town was 21,451 in 2005. However, only 251 sample households are selected for the present study from five city wards out of a total of six city wards of Thimphu town. Each head of sample households was interviewed through a well-structured questionnaire containing questions relating the various aspects of immigrants.

The survey includes key variables such as gender composition and household's status and the results are presented in Table 1. For the purpose of our analysis immigrant households have been classified according to their family status into two major groups: i) family households and ii) single households. The reason behind this classification is to understand the maturity and scale of migration and its stages. It is generally assumed that family migration is a permanent form of migration and single family member are likely to change their decision. The data revealed that 86.06% households are family immigrants and rest 13.19% are single member households. It reflects that Thimphu is a prime choice and a final destination. Likewise there is more or less a balance gender composition in the immigrant population with 50.32% as male members and 49.68% as female immigrants. Thimphu does not show a clear case of male dominant working population as most of the job opportunities in the capital are in the government sectors.

Age distribution of the members of sample households is presented in Table 2. As expected, the immigrant population exhibits a demographic profile in favour of much younger age composition than in average in the

**Table 1.** Family status and sex composition of sample households in Thimphu, 2010

Wards	Family households	Single households	Total Households	Male	Female	Total population
1	44	6	50	86	80	166
2	41	9	50	96	97	193
3	42	8	50	104	72	176
5	42	9	51	84	117	201
6	47	3	50	102	100	202
Total	216 (86.06)	35 (13.94)	251 (100)	472 (50.32)	466 (49.68)	938 (100)

Source: Field work, 2010. Figures in parenthesis are percentages to total

**Table 2.** Age distribution of the sample household members in Thimphu, 2010

Wards	Below 6	7 to 15	16 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 44	45 to 59	Above 60	Total
1	10	23	45	33	29	22	4	166
2	16	15	33	52	31	35	11	193
3	10	23	41	57	23	11	11	176
5	12	31	51	42	30	30	5	201
6	5	42	51	46	28	17	13	202
Total	53 (5.65)	134 (14.28)	221 (23.56)	230 (24.53)	141 (15.03)	115 (12.26)	44 (4.69)	938 (100)

Source: Field work, 2010. Figures in parenthesis are percentages to total

city. These notable differences between the younger and old age groups are directly related to the socio-economic conditions and the relatively recent immigration that took place in Thimphu. The highest proportion, 24.53%, of the population belongs to 25 to 34 age group followed by 23.56% in the age group of 16 to 24. Both the age groups together account for 48.09%, almost half of the total. The third important age group is from 35 to 44 with the share of 15.03% followed by age group of 7 to 15 with 14.28% of total population. The immigrant population in the age group of 45 to 59 constitute 12.26% followed by 5.65% and 4.69% in the age group of below 6 and above 60 years. More or less homogeneous pattern is observed in all sample wards as selected. While looking at gender composition by age groups, the female population range from a minimum of 2.78% in the age group of above 60 years to a maximum of 28.97% in the age group of 25 to 34 of the total population. On the other hand, male population range from a minimum of 6.56% above 60 years to a maximum of 23.72% in the age group of 16 to 24 of the total population. It also shows that the maximum concentration of both genders is in younger age groups and the minimum in the old age group.

## V. Educational Attainments of Sample Households in Thimphu

Since the education of the immigrants is the most crucial element of the Thimphu population, and will inevitably transform Bhutanese educational and human resource landscapes in the coming decades, the educational attainment of the immigrant population is therefore in focus in the survey. The purpose is to elaborate on educational attainments as part of social processes, and the socio-ecological factors that mediate developmental pathways in future. The children below 6 years of age are tabulated separately and not included for measuring literacy standards. The general literacy condition of immigrant population is 76.66% and it is much above the national literacy rate of 59.5% in Bhutan (PHCB) 2005; it is also slightly higher than the urban literacy rate of 75.9% in Bhutan. Out of the total female population of 466, the female literacy goes up to 71.54% which is much higher than national female literacy of 48.7%. On the other hand, out of the total male population of 472, the male literacy goes up to 81.78% which is much higher than national male literacy of 69.1% (PHCB, 2005, p. 241). It is therefore safely assumed that the immigrant population could not

**Table 3.** Educational attainments of sample households in Thimphu, 2010

Wards	Below 6	Monastic Education	Illiterate	Primary	Lower secondary	Middle secondary	Higher secondary	Graduates	Technical education	Total
1	9	10	35	24	22	31	27	6	2	166
2	8	3	45	33	12	34	39	18	1	193
3	—	7	33	25	26	36	39	10	—	176
5	6	2	28	41	21	38	30	33	2	201
6	5	6	50	37	13	—	64	20	7	202
Total	28 (2.98)	28 (2.98)	191 (20.36)	160 (17.05)	94 (10.02)	139 (14.82)	199 (21.26)	87 (9.27)	12 (1.3)	938 (100)

Source: Field work, 2010. Figures in parenthesis are percentages to total

only support one another traversing across multiple social contexts but also can play a pivotal role in the urbanizing national economy.

The educational attainments are graded in seven categories (Table 3). About one fifth of total population (20.36%) are illiterates in the sample households and those below the age of 6 years (2.98%) are not included under any category. Monastic education is a significant element of Bhutanese traditional education system. The Buddhist monks receive monastic education in monasteries to carry the Buddhist lineage forward. There is 2.98% population of the total sample households engaged in monastic education in Thimphu which is more than the share of technical education (1.26%). The data shows that a maximum of 21.26% people have obtained the level of higher secondary school education followed by 17.05% with the primary level. The third important category is middle secondary with 14.82% followed by lower secondary (10.02%). The graduates in the sample are 9.27%. High attainments of immigrant population represented on these seven categories are the bridges and pillars of Bhutan's future development fabric.

## VI. The Economic Status of Sample Households in Thimphu

Urban places historically have offered unparalleled economic opportunities to successive generations of immigrants with economic prospects (Terrazes, 2011). In the beginning, Thimphu attracted a large number of government servants with the opening of various ministries and growing recruitment in the Royal Bhutanese Army and other government offices. As the capital turned gradually in to the commercial place after 1970s, consequently the capital received larger influx of immigrants looking for business opportunities. A building boom in the 1980s

accelerated in the 1990s, with services to support the relatively wealthy government employees and business class in the new urban space including such facilities as a public pool, a movie theatre, coffee shops, and Western cafés (Pommeret, 2006). The avenues of employment in Thimphu are opening gradually due to encouraging policy and capital inflows from India and other countries which support entrepreneurial ventures in the real estate as well as various business sectors. The data presented in table 4 compare occupational structure of migrants' households on the basis of those who were born in Thimphu and those who were not born in Thimphu including those who are second generation migrants.

Out of all 251 households, the shopkeepers stand at the top with 62.55% putting together both categories of migrants. When considered separately, there is a marked difference between the two categories, a maximum of 49.0% shopkeepers belong to those migrants who were not born in Thimphu, while their share in other category is 13.54% of the total households. It indicated the growing interest of the late migrants more towards the business than the other occupations. The share of Government jobs as an occupation is one fourth (25.10%) of both the categories of migrant households with 17.54% share of those who were not born in Thimphu and remaining 7.59% in other category. However there are fewer avenues in the private sectors which cover just 12.35% households of the total sample. Their share in the first category of those who were not born in Thimphu is slightly higher (8.76%) with the least 3.58% in other category. While analysing the overall results, it can be safely assumed that a heavy influx of recent migration with their place of birth in other places than Thimphu has an overall impact in favour of all three categories of occupations.

**Table 4.** The occupational structure of sample households in Thimphu, 2010

	The 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation migrants households in Thimphu			Migrants households born in Thimphu			Total households
	Shopkeepers	Govt. Jobs	Private jobs	Shopkeepers	Govt. Jobs	Private jobs	
1	31	10	2	4	2	1	50
2	26	9	4	9	2	—	50
3	5	10	15	5	10	5	50
5	41	2	1	5	1	1	51
6	20	13	—	11	4	2	50
Total	123 (49.00)	44 (17.54)	22 (8.76)	34 (13.54)	19 (7.59)	9 (3.56)	251 (100)

Source: Field work, 2010. Figures in parenthesis are percentages to total

**Table 5.** Reasons for migration analysed for Immigrant sample households, Thimphu, 2010

Wards	The main reasons for migration					Total households
	Employment	Business	Education	Marriage	Refugee	
1	23	10	1	14	2	50
2	16	13	8	13	—	50
3	6	23	15	6	—	50
5	20	16	6	9	—	51
6	12	25	3	10	—	50
Total	77 (30.87)	87 (34.66)	33 (13.15)	52 (20.71)	2 (0.79)	251 (100)

Source: Field work, 2010. Figures in parenthesis are percentages to total

## VII. Reasons of Migration

As per the Population and Housing Census of Bhutan 2005, the total urban population of Bhutan was 196,111, out of this, Thimphu City had a population of 79,185 persons which accounted for 40.38% of the total urban population in the country. The share of Thimphu city's population in the Thimphu dzongkhag (district) is 80.2%. Thimphu dzongkhag (district) gained a maximum population with 39,770 persons due to in migration from other dzongkhags (districts) of Bhutan in 2005 (PHCB, 2005). Almost all in migrants in Thimphu dzongkhag are absorbed by the Thimphu city. People have moved to Thimphu drawn by a number of pull factors which is a complex process. In the present paper, the reasons of migration are categorized into five groups which are presented in Table 5.

Thimphu provides more ample opportunities for business than other places. It is the main reason as expressed by 34.66% of the total immigrant households. When ranked at the Dzonkhag (district) level, immigrants coming from eastern Dzonkhag (district) with a maximum of 28.73% have immigrated to Thimphu for business followed by within Dzonkhag (district) immigrants with 22.98%. The second important reason of migration to Thimphu is employment as expressed by 30.98% sample households. People migrate in large number from rural to urban areas in search of employment. The agricultural base of rural Bhutanese population does not provide employment to all the people living there. Contrary to this, there is a vast scope for employment in Thimphu in the service sector. Various ministries and departments of Royal Government of Bhutan, private sector enterprises, trade, transport and tertiary services attract immigrants to Thimphu. About 27.27% of total households who migrated for employment come from eastern Dzonkhag (district)

followed very closely (25.97%) by central dzongkhag (district). Marriage is a very important social factor of migration. Of the total sample households who moved to Thimphu, about one fifth (20.71%) moved due to marriage in 2010. The contribution of eastern and southern dzongkhags (districts) is highest being 26.92% and 23.07% respectively in this category. In general, rural areas, by and large, lack educational facilities, especially those of higher education and rural people have to migrate to the urban centres for this purpose. However, the health and education is provided free by Rural Government of Bhutan. The higher educational institutions are not spread over all different parts of the country; as such education has been the fourth and the last choice (13.15%) of sample households who moved to Thimphu. Again the migrants from eastern (36.36%) and southern (21.21%) dzongkhags (districts) in this category rank highest.

## VIII. District (dzongkhag) Wise Distribution of Immigrants by Place of Birth

Table 6 indicates District (dzongkhag) wise distribution of immigrants by place of birth. Thimphu city gained the highest immigrants (40.64%) from eastern dzongkhags of Bhutan comprising Mongar, Trashigang, Lhuentse, Trashiyangtse and Pemagatshel dzongkhags (districts) followed by southern (18.74%) dzongkhags (districts) which include Chhukha, Samtse, Sarpang, Dagana and Samdrup jongkhkar. The migration to Thimphu city from eastern dzongkhags is more than double as those of southern Dzonkhags (districts). The third important migration area to Thimphu is from western dzongkhags (districts) with 15.34% followed by 13.94% from within Thimphu district itself. Thimphu is also a part of western Dzonkhag (district) so including Thimphu, it comes to 29.28%. The least important source of migrants is central



**Table 6.** Immigrant sample households classified by place of Birth, 2010

Wards	Within Dzongkhag	Western Dzongkhag	Central Dzongkhag	Southern Dzongkhag	Eastern Dzongkhag	Total households
1	6	8	5	5	26	50
2	10	12	11	10	7	50
3	2	6	—	4	38	50
5	7	8	6	18	12	51
6	10	5	5	10	20	50
Total	35 (13.94)	39 (15.34)	27 (10.86)	47 (18.74)	103 (40.03)	251 (100)

Source: Field work, 2010. Figures in parenthesis are percentages to the total

Dzongkhag (district) with 10.86%. The migration results of the survey are in concordance with that of Population and Housing Census of Bhutan 2005 (PHCB 2005). The Thimphu dzongkhag (district) in general has received the in migrants in a similar order as observed in the present survey (Nidup and Lhendrup, 2009).

### IX. Year of Migration of Sample Immigrant Households

One important aspect of migration study is conducted on the temporal scale which helps us to identify different phases of migration. The data collected from the sample households is grouped in to six categories and presented in Table 7. Just one household has migrated to Thimphu before 1960. There is a very slow pace of immigration even during 1960 and 1970 with only 7.97% of the total surveyed households migrating to Thimphu. Thimphu began to take shape as an urbanizing area after 1970 and about 11.16% of sample households immigrated in the 1970s. It was during the following decade of 1980–1990, that about 20.72% of sample households immigrated to Thimphu which is just the double percentage of the one of the previous decade. Thimphu evolved very rapidly during

the 1990s having experienced a boom in the construction industry. The highest share of sample households migrated to Thimphu in this decade with 35.86% of the total surveyed households. In the first decade of Twentieth Century, 23.90% of sample households immigrated to Thimphu, indicating the slowing pace of migration. The booming decades of the migration wave was from 1990 to 2010, as a 6/10 of the surveyed households migrated to Thimphu.

### X. Linkages of Sample Households with Place of Birth and Frequency of Visits

The urban dwellers are migrants from their areas of origin and become gradually assimilated into their urban setting. There are various consequences of rural-urban migration to migrants' place attachment. Rural-urban linkage from this perspective is the focus in this section. I use property ownership as an indicator of place attachment. It is a rough estimate of place attachment.

The responses received from the sample immigrant households are organised in to five categories and analysed city ward wise to arrive at a final conclusion. Table 8 which presents these results indicates that a two third

**Table 7.** Year of migration of sample immigrant households in Thimphu, 2010

Wards	Before 1960	1960–70	1970–80	1980–90	1990–2000	After 2000	Total households
1	1	6	9	13	4	17	50
2	—	6	5	17	19	3	50
3	—	2	4	8	28	8	50
5	—	2	3	7	19	20	51
6	—	4	7	7	20	12	50
Total	1 (0.39)	20 (7.97)	28 (11.16)	52 (20.72)	90 (35.86)	60 (23.90)	251 (100)

Source: Field work, 2010. Figures in parenthesis are percentages to total

**Table 8.** Attachment of sample households with place of origin, 2010

Wards	No property	Sold property	Rented	Not sold	Not stated	Total households
1	2	9	—	39	—	50
2	4	7	2	35	2	50
3	10	3	7	30	—	50
5	—	4	—	47	—	51
6	2	5	—	38	5	50
Total	18 (7.21)	28 (11.25)	9 (3.26)	189 (75.38)	7 (2.88)	251 (100)

Source: Field work, 2010. Figures in parenthesis are percentages to total

majority of the sample households (75.38%) have not sold out their property at rural homes. It may indicate that they keep maintaining their ties strongly. In a similar case study of Thimphu by Malathi (2005), the findings suggest that most migrants still put value to their association with their home lands and 80% of rural migrants possess property at rural homes. It seems that one of their relatives or close relations at home is managing their home land to cultivate. About 3.26% households have rented their property at place of birth that is likely to be nearer to some small or medium sized towns. Only 11.25% of the sample households have sold out their land at rural homes indicating their lost connections with their place of birth. Interestingly about 7.21% households have reported that they have no property at all at rural homes. This is the category of rural poor who have migrated to Thimphu for meagre subsistence. There are a few households (2.88%) who have not given any response which may be the case example of very poor category of immigrants or they are neutral of their contacts to their rural homes.

Most people in Thimphu are still identified with where they come from. The Thimphu immigrants particularly those surveyed under present investigation have still strong land ownership ties with the place of birth they were born and brought up and their relations continue

to exist to their rural homes. For those born in Thimphu as the second generation migrants were more inclined to their present homes in Thimphu.

## XI. Frequency of Visits of Sample Households to Place of Origin

As far as rural-urban linkages in Bhutan are concerned, the focus now shifts on the frequency of visits of sample households to place of origin. Based on the sample survey, this section demonstrates that urban-rural linkages are not only important for their counterpart in rural households, but are increasingly becoming an important element of the livelihood (or survival) strategies of the urban migrant households.

For urban and rural populations in Bhutan, global changes in the last two decades have resulted in deepening social differentiation. The results of the visits are presented in Table 9. In total, 80.08% of migrant households in Thimphu town make visits to their rural homes leaving behind 19.92% migrant households who have stopped visiting their rural homes, and thus lost their close personal contacts. Most of the migrants (38.35%) visit their village once in a year. These are often the migrants from eastern dzongkhags (districts) since their villages are at

**Table 9.** Frequency of visits of sample households to place of origin, 2010

Wards	Stopped Visiting	Once in 2, 3 or 4 years	Once in a year	Twice in a year	Thrice in a year	Four times in a year	Total households
1	7	14	17	3	1	8	50
2	10	—	12	11	9	8	50
3	10	—	30	10	—	—	50
5	4	—	27	7	3	10	51
6	19	—	10	5	4	12	50
Total	50 (19.92)	14 (5.68)	96 (38.35)	36 (14.34)	17 (6.88)	38 (14.44)	251 (100)

Source: Field work, 2010. Figures in parenthesis are percentages to total

two day's journey time away from Thimphu. Almost equal numbers of households, 14.44% and 14.34% of migrant households, visit four times and twice in a year. These migrants are mostly from short distances from western dzongkhags (districts). The interesting trend is that the households that migrated to Thimphu between 10 years or so maintain their property at rural homes and their visits are frequent in a year. It is also seen that 5.68% migrant households visit their native places at least once in a two, three or four years' time during the festival or to attend the annual prayers or rituals at home. The overall pattern of visits clearly indicates that the migrants have strong ties with their native places.

## XII. Housing and Living Conditions of Immigrants in Thimphu

Thimphu city has grown in a narrow valley and the land availability to accommodate large population is limited. According to current plans, Thimphu can accommodate at most 80,000 people and this saturation point is expected to be reached by 2006 (Planning Commission 1999). As per the Population and Housing census of Bhutan, Thimphu has recorded population of 79,185 in 2005 already. Given this situation, it is evident that the existing housing facilities in Thimphu may not accommodate the continued influx of in migration from rural Bhutan. Table 10 gives the distribution of sample households according to owned, rented and shops provided by Royal Government. It is the majority of more than half i.e. 50.67% who have rented houses and 38.65% households live in their own houses. There are 10.76% households who have shops including a living space provided by government. The additional housing requirements are difficult to meet because of the difficulty of terrain. The rising level of rent is another pressure on the migrant households. However, by the year 2020, about half of the population of Bhutan

is expected to be urban in contrast to the current 21% in 1999 (Planning Commission 1999). The level of satisfaction about the living conditions as expressed by the respondents is presented in Table 10. Though it is obvious that due to increasing shortage of housing, drinking water and other basic amenities in Thimphu, people have started facing the difficulties, the survey shows that there are about two third (74.10%) households still satisfied with the city life. Those who are not satisfied are 17.93% of the total while 7.97% of the respondents have not given any response.

## XII. Conclusion

Thimphu has witnessed the highest urban growth with heavy influx of immigrant population from all districts in Bhutan. The urban landscape of Thimphu which was nearly absent in 1960's has been now modifying the traditional indigenous rural landscape of the capital at a much faster rate. It was only in the late 1960s and early 1970s that Thimphu began to take on the form that we see today. The 1980s were marked by new policies and strategies to consolidate development areas and streamlining the so far relatively unplanned and haphazard urban development. The 1990s marked the consolidation of the previous phase and traditional architecture was stressed not only in Thimphu but in other smaller district towns also. Migration peaked in the 1990s, but Thimphu has continued to grow vigorously in the first decade of twenty first century. The urbanization process has contributed significantly to the development of Thimphu as a capital of Bhutan. Problems and challenges exist such as the shortage of affordable housing, the huge influx of immigrants, high land prices and disturbances to ecologically fragile areas being faced by the town now. The city corporation has difficulties to even carry out the routine responsibility and the challenges of a very dynamic urban growth. However,

**Table 10.** Housing and living conditions of Immigrants in Thimphu, 2010

Wards	Housing Conditions			Level of satisfaction			Total households
	Owned	Rented	Govt. shops	satisfied	Not satisfied	Not stated	
1	14	33	3	30	18	2	50
2	47	3	—	37	8	5	50
3	20	30	—	42	2	6	50
5	4	30	17	39	11	1	51
6	12	31	7	38	6	6	50
Total	97 (38.65)	127 (50.67)	27 (10.76)	186 (74.10)	45 (17.93)	20 (7.97)	251 (100)

Source: Field work, 2010. Figures in parenthesis are percentages to total

according to the survey, about the two third of the immigrant households still satisfied with the city life.

In 2002, a comprehensive structure plan 2002–2027 has been drawn for the future expansion of Thimphu designating particular area for specific functions. The urban development policy as adopted under this plan also is putting pressure on agricultural land around Thimphu. The analysis which was based on the survey of some selected variables like gender composition, age, occupation and educational characteristics, the living conditions of sample households and their attachment with the place of origin with frequency of visits along with the year of migration and reasons for migration have captured the changing urban landscape and social ecology of Thimphu. Migration is still expected to continue. Thimphu city structural plan has projected a population of 150,000 by 2027 and the strategy to deal with this situation is challenging.

## Acknowledgement

The author is highly grateful to Mr. Jurmey Lotey, Karma Yanmgzome, Kinga Norbu, Thinley Wangmo and Rinzin Lhamo, the student of B.A. Geography/Economics III semester, Sherubtse College Kanglung, Royal University of Bhutan who collected field information for the present research in 2010. This work would not have been undertaken without the field support extended by them during my tenure as the Colombo Plan Professor from India to the Royal Government of Bhutan from 2008 to 2010.

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